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AUTHOR	Seymour, John C.; Blackburn, J. Vernon
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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are: (1) to state basic assumptions underlying a new and different approach to serving college students in their personal growth; (2) to describe the desirable characteristics of a comprehensive educational-vocational development program at the college level; (3) to examine the status of current higher educational practices; and (4) to discuss the role and functions of the program specialist - a new student personnel type proposed in the paper. It is argued that a new specialization is needed in collegiate student personnel work which is referred to as "Student Program Specialist." In this role, he would be responsible for all student academic advising and general career development. (Author/TL)

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PRIORITY NEED IN S.P.A.: PROGRAM SPECIALISTS

A New Approach to Student Advising in Higher Education

By JOHN C. SEYMOUR AND J. VERNON BLACKBURN

University of Alabama

Acknowledgement is gratefully made of the assistance given by Mr. David Hill, doctoral candidate, University of Alabama, in researching background materials for this paper.

George G. Stern (1969) has made the observation that those institutions of higher education which provide opportunities for personal growth on the part of students have far fewer problems than institutions with limited opportunities in this direction. While the concepts and proposals suggested in this paper are not set forth as panaceas for student unrest on the college campus, they are viewed as essential elements in the program of opportunities for personal growth on any campus. These concepts are specifically related to the career development phase of a student's personal growth while in college. Astin and Panos (1969) provide substantive research on the educational and vocational development of college students, and their findings support the need for priority concern in this area of personal growth.

The purpose of this paper is not to add further justification to the need for concern, but rather it is to state basic assumptions underlying a new and different approach to serving student needs in this area, to describe the desirable characteristics of a comprehensive educational-vocational development program at the college level, to examine the status of current practices related to student's educational and vocational development in higher education today, and to discuss the role and functions of the program specialist a new student personnel type proposed in this report. This paper will use the phrase "career development' in lieu of "educational and vocational development."

Two basic assumptions should be examined prior to exploring the world of the program specialist in higher education. First, long-range directionalism

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--es suggested by Allport (1965) in his concept of "propriate striving" - promotes personality stability in individuals which is noticeably lacking if one's goals are essentially short-term or are borne on the winds of chance. Indeed, Allport's views suggest that such personal direction may be responsible for reducing to some degree unrest within students. He states,

> When the individual is dominated by segmental drives, by compulsions, or by the wind of circumstance, he has lost the integrity that comes only from maintaining major directions of striving. The possession of long-range goals, regarded as central to one's personal existence, distinguishes the human being from the animal, the adult from the child, and in many cases the healthy personality from the sick (pp. 50-51).

The second assumption relates to the development of realistic career objectives as a psychological process as opposed to an event or the specific point in time at which a choice is made. Super (1957) has had a significant influence in this regard as he propounds the emergence of a significant self-concept as one negotiates a series of vocational developmental tasks. This paper takes the position that career development processes which are emphasized by specific attention from significant persons in the student environment provide students with reasonable, envisionable long-range goals which are quickly incorporated into the personality structure as appropriate movement toward an enhanced state of being.

Desirable characteristics of a formal program designed to produce opportunities for personal growth can be enumerated. First, the program should serve ALL students enrolled in the institution according to each student's individual needs. It is reasonable to expect that students at any given institution would vary widely in their career developmental stages, and meaningful assistance would be that help provided at the current level of development of each student. The second characteristic which would be desired in this program is that it acts as a facilitator of integration of existing programs, services, and opportunities for personal growth. Specifically, the program is seen as giving new meaning to institutional testing programs, orientation, counseling, and placement services; it enhances these existing services rather than replacing or supplanting them within the institution.

Another characteristic of the program is closely related to the last one mentioned: the program serves to smooth out the transition from one institutional process and/or service to another and is so organized that it prevents students from becoming "lost" in a whirlpool of institutional life. In other words, the program lends a degree of logic and normalcy to the sequence of experiences through which students progress. Still another characteristic worthy of mention here is that professional personnel with adequate qualifications to perform in their roles are utilized within the program, but varying levels of competency can be accomodated while ensuring quality service to students. The implication seems clear and simple: the program is so organized that entry-level professional staff (M.A. degree as a minimum) are supervised by senior, advanced-level professionals.

Finally, the program must maintain a high degree of flexibility which permits maximum response to individual needs and situations. The admonition inherent in this characteristic seems to shout, "Never drop a student from active participation in the program because you feel he is 'all set' and well on his way." Failure in course work, change of career objective, leaving and returning to college, and a great many other circumstances preclude "closed" cases as long as the individual is enrolled in the institution. The student must have the opportunity to utilize the services of the program at any time; the program must maintain periodic contact with the student even though his program appears to be going well.

The thesis of this paper is that a new type of specialization is needed in collegiate student personnel work if such a program is to be realized. This new specialist is referred to here as the "Student Program Specialist." He is responsible for all student academic advising and general career development at this concept is used in this paper. Since the basis for a successful career development program is successful academic advisory service, our purposes may be served best by examining the current status of related practices and programs which are common to higher education today. This examination will permit an evaluation of these services and programs in terms of the objective being discussed now, career development.

There are four areas of institutional activity which appear to be closely related to the topic: Orientation, the counseling service, the placement service, and faculty advising. Each of these will be discussed briefly.

Orientation

Orientation as it now exists can be divided into two broad categories. The first provides a pre-college experience varying from two to five days sometime during the summer prior to the fall semester. The other is a program during the first semester the freshman is on campus developed around a series of convocations or as in some cases it is made part of a required course (English). In almost all cases orientation does not go beyond the freshman year. Perusal of orientation literature indicates that neither approach has been found to be clear in its goals nor effective in meeting the needs of the students. In a survey of two state universities, Black (1964) found that:

(1) The freshman students wanted more emphasis to be placed on academic activities and less on social.

(2) The students felt that much of the information given during orientation was premature, and consequently soon forgotten.

Cole and Ivey (1967) at Colorado State University did not find significant differences between students attending and not attending a pre-college orientation with reference to the following:

(1) Being more certain of a college major

(2) Being more confident of their chances for successful academic performance

(3) Having a difference in attitudes toward academic achievement, social life, counseling, or the University

(4) Having a higher level of academic achievement during the first quarter of college

Rothman and Leonard (1967) at Cuyahoga Community College reported no significant difference between the experimental and control groups on mean grade point averages of the first and second semesters and no significant differences in value orientation at the end of one semester. Griffin and Donnan (1970), Auburn University, found that freshmen who attended orientation were not helped significantly to improve academic performance. There was no statistically significant difference with regard to the number of freshmen students who changed their curricula or who withdrew from school in either group.

Counseling Services

After surveying counseling centers in 60 major colleges, Warnath (1969) states that the present philosophical and operational approach of most centers do not allow them to reach more than 15 per cent of the student body in a given year. They concluded, "By sheer necessity, counseling centers are searching for more appropriate and effective methods for bringing the potential of their professional staff to bear on problems affecting a larger proportion of the campus community" (p. 38).

Lohnes (1969) identified crystallization of occupational goals and a strategy for pursuing that goal as a major developmental task of college students. The college forces the student to choose a curriculum which will be limiting in its range of future development in other areas. The student who realizes the implications of this choice will experience an identity crisis in the face of this task. To this Lohnes states

> The institution prompting this problem should provide assistance to its students in their career development struggles. A career guidance services program should be available to all college students. In general, the program should help each student know himself, understand the educational and vocational structure of our society, and relate this knowledge in exploring his career potentialities. This leads to crystallization of career goals and a strategy for pursuing them through a planned series of personal initiatives, educational and otherwise. Specifically, the prototype college guidance system should focus on helping student choose appropriate and satisfying colelge majors.

Super (1957) states that

> If educational programs are to make their needed contribution to vocational development, the responsibility for planning and for co-ordinating them, and the responsibility for carrying out specialized aspects of these programs such as appraisal and counseling, must be assigned to staff members who are specifically trained for this type of work (p. 311).

Having identified the responsibility for career development as a counseling function, Super raises an important question. Are counseling agencies adequately prepared to respond to these student needs? Lohnes (1969) acknowledged that the responsibility for vocational and developmental needs of students usually rests with the counseling center. But this presents two problems:

(1) The average counselor sees himself as a therapist who should be applying himself to helping seriously disturbed young people, and

(2) The average counseling resources are so limited that, if a majority of college students sought career guidance, the staff would be completely swamped (p. 17).

In a study by May and Warnath (1967) at Oregon State University it was found that most students did not know where occupational information was available and only a small percent knew there were occupational files in the counseling center and in the library. The great majority wanted the university to provide a central occupational file with most naming the student union (40 percent) or university library (25 percent) as the best location. The counseling center was mentioned by only two percent of the students.

Simpson (1967) indicated that 20 percent of the students have a good understanding of their goals, another 20 percent have a general idea of their goals and neither will experience difficulty with their college careers. The remaining 60 percent lack objectives and will need assistance.

Placement Services

Arbuckle (1953) observed that placement is the final phase of a career development program. To be sure, placement is an important aspect of any such program and is a highly specialized operation. In terms of career development placement services without prior contributions from other programs would be characterized as "Too little, too late."

Faculty Advisors

A number of writers--included among these Melvene Hardee (1969) and E. H. Koile (1964)--have worked both faithfully and diligently to show that the college faculty member can effectively handle the responsibility of academic advisement for students It is notable that at this time there appears to be little or no empirical data to support this view but there is considerable evidence to the contrary.

A survey of freshmen at a large state institution, which exerted a great deal of time and effort to the traditional orientation and faculty advising, found that 66% of the students were very negative in their attitudes towards this program (Cecil, 1970).

Jamrich (1955) surveyed 30 selected colleges and investigated the organizational procedures in faculty advising. Only one-third reported that their programs could be labeled "successful."

Donk and Oetting (1968) found that only 25% of the 360 faculty members surveyed indicated the present system effective. They characterized the faculty-advisor program as one which has generally deteriorated to merely clerical chores of course selection and schedule signing.

Dilley (1967) conducted research to determine the availability of faculty for student consultation. He reported that 50% of the faculty surveyed were unavailable for consultation when serious efforts were made to contact them.

Robert F. Topp (1970) provost of the U. S. International University states that "regular" university professors, generally speaking, are not good scheduling counselors. Simpson (1967, p. 288) states that "the word advisement has degenerated to mean the selection of courses for a particular term during the hustle and bustle of a highly structured short period of time for registration or pre-registration." He further states that over half the courses dropped and added at the beginning of each term are the result of poor advising.

Krapf (1968) surveyed 203 private and church related colleges; the purpose was to determine the extent of faculty involvement in student advising programs and to determine whether there are trends toward the employment of full time counselors to carry a portion of this role. Ninety-eight percent of the schools had faculty involved in advisement and of this group 37% favored major changes in the faculty advising program.

Musella and Rusch (1968) in one study revealed that competency, knowledge, and the ability to organize and explain were more important to students than the professors' attitudes towards students.

Tead (1962) points out a need, which is probably universally felt in higher education, for more faculty involvement with students. Interestingly enough, however, his comments are directed toward those kind of involvements which are intellectually stimulating and explorative in nature, and not the kind of relationships which have as a central focus the rather narrow view of schedule planning.

These findings carry with them important implications for consideration of the faculty's role in higher education. The faculty should be recognized as high level personnel with organizational and functional planning abilities which enable them to effectively promote learning in others. These talents must be used in ways which are constructive and contribute directly to the teaching-learning process per se. Through being relieved of the program advising chores which are presently assigned to faculty members, the faculty gains time for instructional planning, in-service study which leads to increased teaching effectiveness, and relationships with

students who have the aptitude for and interest in the individual professor's field of specialization. Similarly, the student gains by this arrangement in still other ways. In addition to more effective teachers in his classes, he receives help from a specialist who is sensitive to his educational, personal, social, financial, vocational, and ethical concerns, a full-time institutional staff member whose total efforts are directed toward such assistance.

The Program Specialist: Role and Function

The program specialist is viewed as a new specie in the student personnel family; consequently, this statement on his role and functions is suggestive at this point in time rather than definitive. However, certain responsibilities and functions can be ascribed to the position by deductive reasoning based on knowledge of both career development concepts and higher education institutional processes. The following list should enable one to formulate a workable idea of this new position and the program in which it is centered:

(1) The program specialist is involved in an integral manner in the orientation program of the institution. He helps develop the orientation program so that a student's initial registration for classes evolves from the orientation experiences as a natural consequence. He is responsible for the initial registration of all students who are assigned to him. Assignment of students is based upon the area of academic interest declared by the student since the program specialist himself serves a limited field of the academic area. For example, students who declare an interest in natural sciences would be assigned to a program specialist who devotes his attention to students in the natural science area. A specialist would also be available to the undecided student.

(2) The program specialist schedules new students for small-group program development sessions during the first term they are enrolled. He is responsible for sorting his advisees into groups which lend themselves

to high productivity levels. During the small group meetings, he provides each student with opportunities to explore fully the options, requirements, and decisions which must be made. Each advisee completes an educational program plan which sets out each step leading to graduation.

(3) Test interpretation is an important part of the program specialist's work. Students may need this type of assistance at orientation, during small group sessions, or at any later period in his college career. Normally, the program specialist would not administer tests, but would confine his services to interpretation.

(4) He develops a system of information relateddto both educational and vocational development. A sound knowledge of the curricula offerings of academic areas he serves as well as of vocational or career opportunities related to those areas is anessential part of his expertise. He maintains close contact with the faculty in the academic areas for which he is responsible, and changes in academic curricula or requirements are transmitted to him immediately upon approval so that any impact upon students can be provided for in a minimum time period.

(5) The program specialist develops and/or uses an automatic data processing system in handling student program plans on file with him. His system is so constructed as to permit projections of course needs thus enabling his institution to offer courses and establish sections based on student requirements rather than guesswork. He would contribute materially to his institution's avoiding courses which don't "make", overloaded sections because of unexpected demands and imblances in faculty loads. The system permits students to obtain inexpensive copies of their programs for review at any time and facilitates changes they wish to make in their programs. In addition, the automated records make identification of those influenced by curricula changes simple.

(6) Referral services are integral to the program specialist's opera-

tion. Students with deep concerns in the area of career development or with other concerns which prevent adequate progress in this area are readily identified and are referred to the established counseling service of the institution. Referral is handled by a qualified professional and should enhance the chances of success in the ensuing work of the center's counselor. The program specialist knowledgeable about other services-health, financial aids, etc.-and can refer students as indicated by their concerns.

(7) Placement of graduating students is enhanced by the work of the program specialist as he readies his students to take advantage of the services available in this area. The transition from program specialist to placement specialist is a smooth, logical process and functions for both those seeking immediate employment and those preparing to enter graduate study.

(8) Individual services to students include a periodic review of the records of students assigned to a particular program specialist (the ADP system updates records routinely as to grades earned, etc.), scheduling individual conferences upon request by students as well as at the discretion of the program specialist, review and approval of all course changes, specific counseling for withdrawals and for students desiring to reduce their academic loads, and counseling suggested by members fo the faculty for certain students. These services would provide a degree of contact of a specific nature that is almost unknown in higher education today.

(9) Finally, the program specialist certifies to the appropriate authority on campus the eligibility of students for graduation. This service simplifies a problem that provides headaches for many college registrars today, but it does not eliminate the need for certain services by their offices.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that full time academic counselors have been used successfully in a few institutions. Meskill and Sheffield (1970) provide a report on one such venture. The idea of full-time academic counselors is certainly a step in the step in the direction pointed to in this paper. However, the position taken here is that student personnel must move ahead much farther and encompass the full scope of responsibilities which are seen as the role of the program specialist: comprehensive career development assistance.

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